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SUBJECT: FRENCH AMBASSADOR PURSUES KOUCHNER/RICE PULL-ASIDE
WITH UZBEK FM NOROV IN PARIS

REF: TASHKENT 624

Classified By: Ambassador Richard B. Norland; reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Praising Uzbek Foreign Minister Norov in Paris for releasing political prisoner Mutabar Tojiboeva could encourage the Uzbeks to do more of the same in coming weeks. This in turn would facilitate efforts to cooperate with Uzbekistan on ground transit of supplies to U.S. forces in Afghanistan. End Summary.

¶2. (C) French Ambassador to Uzbekistan Hugues Pernet is flying to Paris with Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov on June 10, hoping to parlay engagement on the margins of the June 12 Afghanistan donors conference into further progress on human rights in the wake of the Uzbek government's June 2 decision to release human rights activist Mutabar Tojiboeva. Ambassador Pernet has broached with French Foreign Minister Kouchner the idea of a joint pull-aside in which he and Secretary Rice would take two minutes to tell Norov that Tojiboeva's release was significant and should be followed by release of the remaining 10 or 12 prominent human rights activists currently incarcerated in Uzbekistan. Pernet asked Ambassador Norland if the U.S. would join in this effort.

¶3. (C) The French are convinced -- and we agree -- that Tojiboeva's release is qualitatively different from earlier releases of political prisoners in Uzbekistan. She is among the most prominent and principled of those whom the Uzbeks have sentenced to prison for their criticism of the government and their support for human rights, particularly given her refusal to sign a confession that might have secured her release earlier. In releasing her now on medical grounds, the government knew she would continue to publicly criticize the political system and President Karimov -- and she has not disappointed. For example, shortly after her release, Tojiboyeva referred to Uzbek prisons as "islands of torture" during an interview with Radio Free Europe.

¶4. (C) In our view, engaging Norov briefly in this fashion could have a salutary effect on Uzbek thinking about how to proceed in addressing Western concerns about human rights. As Assistant Secretary Boucher told President Karimov here on June 2 (reftel), we need to see still more progress on human rights, including release of more political prisoners like Tojiboyeva. Having this message reinforced by the Secretary can only help. Producing progress on human rights can, in

turn, make it politically possible for us to cooperate with Uzbekistan on efforts to lock in ground transit arrangements in support of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, which will be the subject of TRANSCOM General Schwarz' June 24-25 visit to Uzbekistan.

NORLAND